

Summary of 2007 REAP Assemblies

Evaluation Results

Statewide, a rough count for each assembly showed 30 to 50% were attending their first REAP assembly, or that this assembly was their first association with REAP. A statewide summary of the assembly evaluations is attached, but the most rewarding findings were that 87% of the respondents felt they contributed to the assembly *to their satisfaction* and 12% felt they contributed *though somewhat limited*.

Similarly, 76% thought the assembly *was* beneficial to their region and 19% thought it *maybe* beneficial.

It is interesting to note that those who reported *fair or extensive knowledge* of REAP were more than twice as likely to own REAP plates as those reporting *no or limited knowledge* of REAP.

Disclaimers on Recommendations to Improve REAP

With 369 separately listed ideas for REAP improvement from 17 assemblies, the attempt to combine 'similar' ideas will result in generalizations that lose some of the detail in the original idea. The general concepts, however, are worth noting in their relative abundance.

From information presented to audiences in the formal assembly program and in answers to their questions, audiences generally recommended solutions to problems that were presented to them, in addition to solutions to other problems conceived by them.

At some assemblies, the audiences were clearly led to support recommendations of others in the audience by including a hatch mark behind that idea, then, sometimes adding additional ideas. At other assemblies, the audience was not as clearly led to add hatch marks as much as to come up with different ideas, so the lack of hatch marks in some assemblies does not necessarily mean that more of the audience does not support the recommendation.

While all audience inputs were listed if they came close enough to be termed a 'recommendation for REAP improvement,' perhaps as many as one-quarter of those were not specific enough to guess at what could actually be done to implement it, and some others were actually outside of the REAP arena, altogether.

All this being said, following is the REAP Coordinator's summary of the top 7 recommendations from the assemblies, listed in order of frequency the recommendations were brought up. You can review all the inputs in another handout.

1. Full Funding

Full funding of REAP was supported at all assemblies. In about 1/3 of them, more than \$20 million was recommended. Most recommendations on full funding suggested that it be sustainable, long-term funding and that it be protected exclusively for REAP.

2. More Public Education About REAP

In addition to recommending that more be done to make the public and legislators aware and supportive of REAP, many specific recommendations suggested how this should be done. Whether at the local level, by the State, or both, there were several strongly voiced opinions that REAP 'marketing' be carried out with professional assistance. It was occasionally suggested that more money be allocated for the purpose, from diverting license plate money or increasing DNR's 1% for administration.

3. More and Better Publicity on REAP Assembly Meetings

Fueled by the value they got from the assemblies, many, many suggestions including doing more to promote attendance at them. A couple of assemblies had more people than the previous year, but many more had fewer.

Publicity efforts were as strong for this round of assemblies as it was for the previous two rounds, although attendance was down about 25%. In addition to the significant local promotion of many county conservation boards and some REAP county committees, pre-assembly promotions by the DNR included:

- Emailed news releases to all newspapers, 2 weeks before the assembly in their readership area; followed up with 1 to 3 phone calls to help assure use
- Mailed invitations to all those below three weeks prior to their assembly:
 - City clerks, about 900
 - County supervisors, about 400
 - Legislators, 250
 - All active PF members, about 18,000
 - 3 separate emails to 700+ on REAP distribution list from 2006

Perhaps good fall weather encouraged more people to stay home and work outside in advance of the coming bad weather. Some may have missed all the promotional efforts, still thinking the assemblies would be in winter months.

4. Retaining the Formula vs. Increasing Funding in Specific Categories

In every assembly it was recommended to keep the formula the same as it has been for 18 years. And, in every assembly there were recommendations to change it to increase an allocation in one or more areas. More money for conservation education led the pack, followed by more for open spaces, more for maintenance, more for trails, more for historic sites, more for soil and water enhancement, more for DNR and/or county committees to promote REAP.

Many recommendations referred to allocating more funding, or grant scoring preference for maintenance of REAP developments and land vs. spending more on new projects

Although prevalent at only about ¼ of the assemblies, there was a strong push by lower population counties and cities to increase their share of REAP funds vs. the larger counties and cities that they said have many other opportunities for funding in addition to REAP. From the county conservation board side, the point was clearly made that residents from large population counties come to low population counties to recreate out of doors, much more so than the reverse, and that per population distribution of funds is not in line with reality.

5. County Committees

Probably because the county committee issue was brought up in the formal program of the assemblies, nearly all audiences made recommendations related to the topic. The question was asked in about ¼ of the assemblies: “How many here are or have been on your county committee?” Blank stares and very few hands up made it clear that most were unaware of them. It is easier to make recommendations for someone else to do something than it is to volunteer to participate. I am not as convinced of audience support of all the positive things they recommended for county committees as I would have been if more of them said they would want to serve on one.

At a couple of assemblies, representatives of the Councils of Government suggested they take the lead in doing on county committee activities, taking several counties together to make ‘regional’ 5-year plans.

6. More Partnerships

Nearly all assemblies had at least one reference to improving partnerships, whether with local or state economic development interests, conservation or historic organizations, schools, farmers and farm organizations and so on. While the partnering aspect is somewhat addressed by the REAP Alliance’s representation of many of these groups, audiences, particularly first timers, were unaware of the Alliance or their activities on a local level.

7. More Youth Involvement

As it is with about any ‘governmental’ meeting in Iowa, the average age of audiences appeared rather old! Frequent inputs from the audiences, particularly for several legislators, was that something needs to be done to involve youth more in the public participation side of REAP.

Stacey Olson, 24, DNR REAP assistant, has been in communication with the organizers of the Governor’s Generation Commission, composed of young Iowans who are providing inputs to the Governor for state initiatives to reverse the loss of talented Iowa youth to other states. She is exploring options for a connection between REAP and youth and is expected to have some optional concepts for the REAP Congress.